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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [NP](#)
SUBJECT: FEW CANDIDATES FILE FOR ELECTIONS

REF: A. KATHMANDU 228

[1](#)B. KATHMANDU 254
[1](#)C. KATHMANDU 80

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) On January 26, the deadline to file for candidacy in the February 8 municipal elections, the government announced that 3,255 people had filed to run for 4,416 open seats. However, as there were multiple candidates for some posts, more than one-third of the seats had no registered candidate, and another one-third had only one candidate. Acknowledging the low candidate turnout, the Election Commission, in an unprecedented move, announced it would set other dates to file in municipal wards which had no candidate. To encourage more candidates to file, the government also publicized that government insurance for election workers would cover candidates. Seven-Party alliance politicians and civil society activists criticized the quality of the candidates who had filed to run, noting that most had never before been involved in politics and were opportunists and the unemployed. End Summary.

No Candidate For One Out Of Three Seats

[1](#)2. (U) On January 26, the deadline to file for candidacy in the 58 municipalities, the government announced that 3,255 people had filed to run in the February 8 municipal election. Although 236 candidates filed for mayor and 192 candidates for deputy-mayor, some localities had no candidates. As there were multiple candidates for some posts, over one-third of the seats had no registered candidate, and another one-third had only one candidate. The Kathmandu Post reported that not a single municipality had candidates for all seats. In Kathmandu, no candidates filed at all in three of the thirty-five wards (each ward has about five representatives) and a total of 169 candidates filed for 177 seats, including ten for mayor, and eight for deputy mayor. Participation was mixed in two other areas of the Kathmandu Valley: in Bhaktapur, the mayor and deputy mayor will be elected unanimously, as only one candidate for each post filed; but in Lalitpur, 26 candidates filed papers for 17 seats. No one representing a national party recognized by the Election Commission filed for candidacy in the Kathmandu

Valley. In the central hilly city of Baglung, only 12 candidates filed to contest 57 seats. In the far west terai city of Mahendranagar, fewer than 40 candidates filed to contest 97 seats.

Election Commission Relaxed Rules

¶3. (U) In acknowledgment of the low candidate turnout, Election Commissioner Keshav Raj Rajbhandari announced on the evening of January 26 on Nepal Television that the Election Commission would announce additional dates for filing candidacy in municipal wards in which no one had yet filed. This municipal election was the first time in Nepal's history that election rules were thus relaxed. The Election Commission had also relaxed other rules, such as not requiring someone to "second" a candidate, and not requiring a photo of the candidate to register with the Election Commission.

Government Attempts to Address Maoist Threat

¶4. (U) To encourage more candidates to file, the government publicized that government insurance for election workers also covered candidates. The Assistant Minister for Home Affairs traveled to Janakpur, in eastern Nepal, on January 26 to hand over a check from the government for 150,000 NR (2,100 USD) to the widow of mayoral candidate Ramalal Das, whom the Maoists had killed on January 22 (ref A). There was no news of a candidate from Bardiya who had been abducted by Maoists (ref B). Meanwhile, an NGO called the Partnership for Protection of Children in Armed Conflict submitted a memorandum to the Election Commission asking that voting booths not be set up in schools as that could put children at risk from Maoist violence.

Rana-led RPP and Praja Parishad Party Boycott Polls

¶5. (U) On January 25, a day after the election commission froze the Rastriya Prajantanttra Party (RPP) symbol of the plow (ref C), the Pashupati Shamsheer Rana-led faction of the Party formally announced its boycott of the municipal elections. This reversed the Party's earlier decision, which had empowered district committees to decide for themselves whether or not to take part in the polls. Meanwhile, the Kamal Thapa-led faction of the Party was forced to field candidates under the symbol of a flower vase. Thapa claimed that his Party had fielded candidates in sixty-five percent of wards nationwide. Nepal's oldest political party, Nepal Praja Parishad, also announced on January 25 that it would boycott the elections.

Parties Question Quality of Candidates, Call Elections "Joke"

¶6. (C) The January 27 newspapers highlighted colorful candidates, most of whom had never stood for election before. Filing for candidacy as Kathmandu Ward 4 chairperson was a school janitor, who said the headmaster at her school had "requested" she run. Chandra Prakash Mainali, Leader of the United Left Front and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist Leninist), told Emboff that in addition to the major political parties, even smaller parties were boycotting the municipal election. He asserted that many of those who filed their candidacy were "opportunists, unemployed, and knew nothing about politics." K.P. Oli, Central Committee Member of the UML, opined that only royalists had filed their candidacy and termed the election a "mockery." Dilip Bhattarai, a worker at the American Corner in Bhairahawa, told Emboff that "even reputed pro monarchists did not dare to file nominations for municipal polls." He added that "ninety-five percent of the candidates have neither political backgrounds nor sound social status." Of the four persons running for Bhairahawa mayor, one had an arrest warrant in India because of his alleged involvement with Pakistani ISI, and was known as a smuggler and dealer of

counterfeit currency; another candidate was a call girl; yet another candidate was a police and army ration contractor representing Nepal Sadvabana Party (Badri Mandal group); and the last was new to district politics. Bhattarai noted that the government had ordered the local army and police authorities to search candidates as they filed nominations.

Human Rights NGOs Skeptical of Elections

17. (C) Calling it a "big joke," Subodh Pyakurel, President of local NGO INSEC, said that many of those who filed their candidacy had been compelled to do so. He questioned the government's decision to provide insurance to the candidates if they were killed or injured, but not to voters as well, as voter's lives were also at risk. He estimated that only one fourth of the seats had candidates. He noted that the person who filed for Mayor in Kalaiya Municipality, Bara District, had publicly announced that he filed to earn money to pay back a loan of ten million rupees (139,500 USD). Charan Prasai, President of local NGO Human Rights Organization of Nepal (HURON), told Emboff that the seven-party alliance, in addition to the ongoing fear of Maoist retributions, had discouraged people from filing candidacy for the municipal election. He questioned the legitimacy and validity of the election in the absence of major political parties. Prasai who was visiting Birgunj, Parsa District, stated that he did not see any glow or enthusiasm on the faces of those people who registered their names for the election.

Comment

18. (C) The Parties' successful nation-wide strike, and fear of Maoist violence appear to have kept people from filing to run in municipal elections. With no candidates for one-third of the seats, and no major political parties participating, it is hard to see how these elections will represent the will of the people.

MORIARTY